

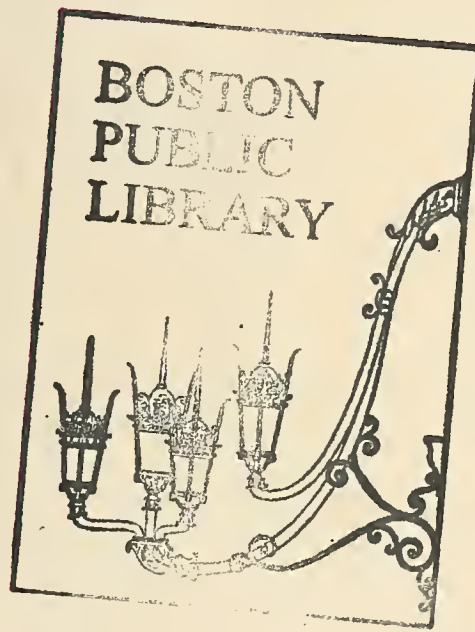
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PRELIMINARY



NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE  
CENTRAL (NORTH END)

OCTOBER 2, 1974

Boston Redevelopment Authority

Planning Department

CENTRAL (NORTH END) District Planning Program



North End  
B65R  
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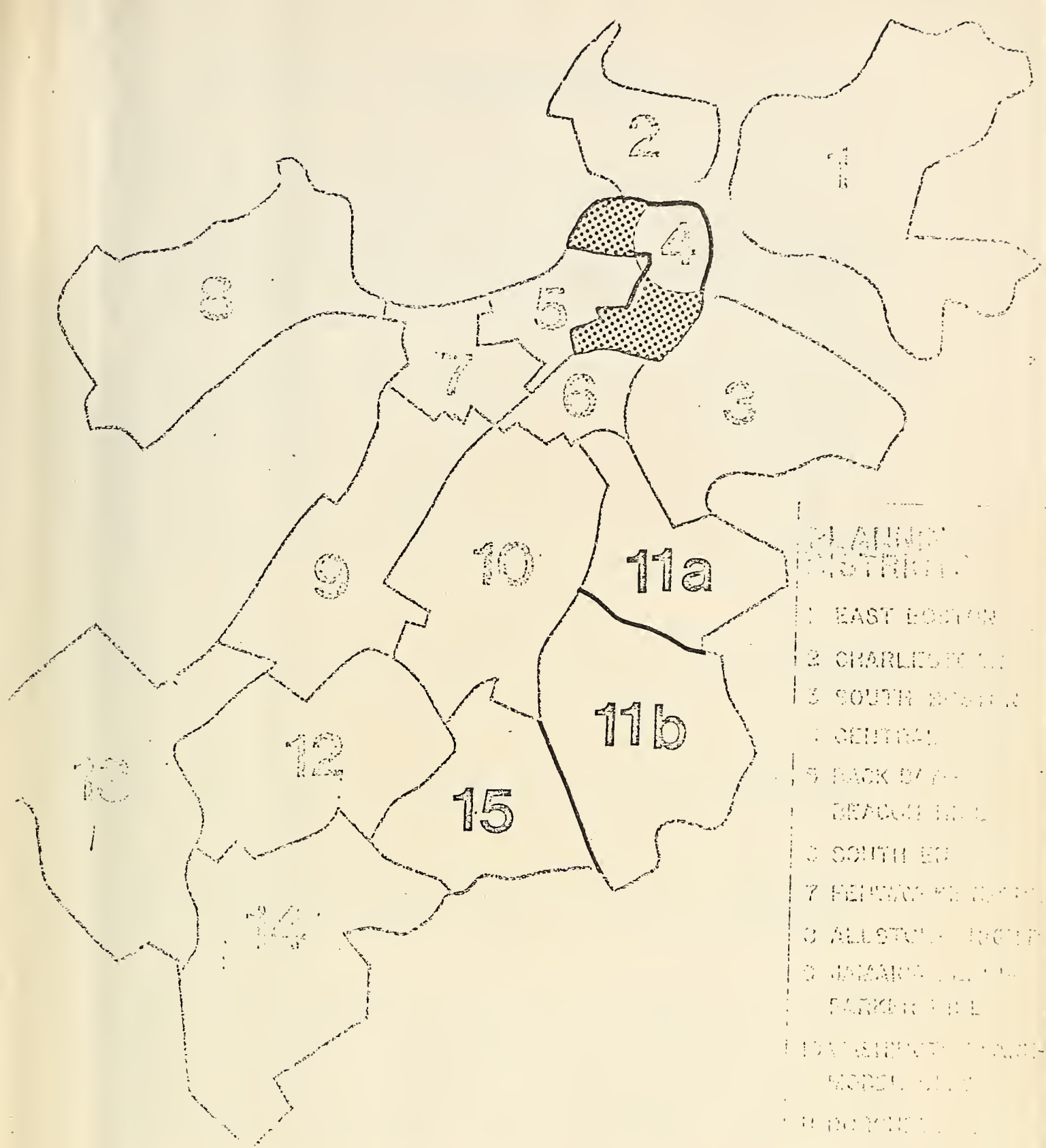
NORTH END

WATERFRONT



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**PLAINS DISTRICT**

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## NORTH END/WATERFRONT

### History

The North End is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the City.

During the early history of the city, and up to the time of the Revolution, the North End was a fashionable residential center closely allied with the Harbor activity and Copp's Hill was the most important of the hills in the early colony. By 1919 the North End had gone through a series of progressive changes until it was a tenement district of high density.

Originally, the North End was a hilly pasture north of the first settlement of Boston. Gradually, it was populated by tradesmen and artisans. In 1664, Hanover Street was the main artery with a shore road around the greater part of the district. A complete network of street and alleys had developed with relatively large blocks between streets of reasonable width and many back lots approached only by narrow and crooked passages. Maps of 1722 and 1728 showed a considerable change from 1645. The principal streets in the North End, which are nearly identical with the important streets today, were largely built up. In the early eighteenth century it became a distinctly fashionable neighborhood. Mansions and cottages closely lined the crooked and narrow streets and alleys.

About the time of the Revolution a marked change took place in the character of the North End. A 1795 survey shows continued filling toward the east. By 1800 there were three mills for meal, lumber and chocolate on what is now Blackstone Street and on Commercial Street there were factories for brass, iron, cannon, bells and earthenware.

A plan for 1814 of the North End shows solidly built-up blocks from Dock Square through Washington and Water Street, Liberty Square and Broad Street to India Wharf. It shows the North End developed along the three main arteries, North Street, Hanover Street and Salem Street.

By 1874 the North End was filled with crowded buildings, the land was cut up into many small holdings, rear yards had mostly disappeared and many interior lots had become occupied. The North End was covered with small buildings, fronting on narrow courts and places, many only 6 to 10 feet wide.

By 1920, the North End had gained its present appearance. The homogeneous brick apartments which replaced the Old Georgian mansions and modest frame houses did not alter the colonial street pattern significantly. The majority of the buildings were built as cold water tenement buildings to house the large number of immigrants that were arriving from Europe. The general tendency at that time was toward concentrated habitations, covering all available space and extending to five or six stories in height, with many of the buildings having retail businesses on the ground floors.





The North End has been the landing point for new waves of immigrants since the early 19th Century, and ethnically the North End has experienced three major transitions. The Irish population gradually grew to dominate the area and in 1850 approximately half of the 23,000 occupants of the North End were Irish. As the century proceeded, the Irish were replaced by Russian and Polish Jews. Toward the end of the century they were gradually replaced with Italians. In 1915, the ethnic composition of the North End was approximately 90 percent Italian. That figure remained the same up through the fifties, but today is declining.

Today the North End is almost within the heart of the downtown, yet semi-isolated and very different from the core of the city. The overriding reason for the contrast in scale and character has been the construction of the Central Artery. When the Artery was built in the early 1950's the North End was much more a part of the City in both scale and character. In the years after the construction of the artery great changes occurred in the downtown, with an almost complete transformation of the core of the city. During this period the presence of the Artery marked the edge of new development, and by isolating the North End, did much to preserve the old world flavor of the area.

The Waterfront Renewal Project has in recent years began to change the physical and social appearance of the North End and Waterfront areas. New development such as Harbor Towers, and the conversion of the historic wharf buildings into luxury housing have begun the creation of a new neighborhood very different from the adjacent North End.

### Population

The population of the North End has been declining for over 25 years, from a high of near 25,000 to 10,250 in 1970. In the last couple of years the population seems to have stabilized and may soon start a very gradual increase. The reasons for the great loss of population are many, but the two most important are that until after World War II the overcrowding in the community was very bad, with whole families living in one or two rooms with no bath rooms in the apartment or often in the building. The great exodus to the suburbs that affected the rest of the country also allowed the thinning out of the North End and the creation of more desirable apartments. The Immigration rate had slowed down by that time, and the overriding need of new immigrants for housing in a "Little Italy" was not so great. The second contributing factor to the decline was the construction of the Central Artery, which dislocated a substantial number of dwelling units and local businesses. For the last twenty years there has been a continuing process of combining small tenement apartments into larger units. This has resulted in further reduction of the number of dwelling units in the community. As the children of the first generation have become adults and married, they have often been unable to find housing in the community and have moved to the suburbs. The percentage of elderly residents is high and rising, as they have been the most reluctant to leave and sever the intense social ties of a traditional Italian community.



The neighborhood is still a family neighborhood, but in the last 5 to 8 years, the area has become attractive to other, non-Italian residents. These new residents have been for the most part young singles or marrieds without children; persons who work in or near the downtown and are attracted to the area by the low rents, the proximity to the downtown, and the reputation for being a very safe neighborhood.

The Italian community is concerned by the threats of change that are all around the community. The new-found attractiveness of the area is causing increasing numbers of landlords to make improvements to their buildings, often of a superficial nature, and rent to new tenants at up to several times the old rent. The development of new apartments that has been increasing in the area from former non-residential properties has been directed toward outsiders, with the result that developers create efficiency and one bedroom apartments for the most part. The creation of the Waterfront community has not only created a luxury housing area adjacent to the traditional blue collar neighborhood, but the new residents and associated commercial development have served to further break down the psychological barriers that helped keep change from the community.

The Waterfront community is now about 1000 people and will grow to about 3000 within the next 2-3 years. The vast majority of the residents will be upper -income, and very different in background and lifestyle than the North Enders.

### Housing

The housing market in the North End is almost all in with the context of apartment supply and demand, as the vast majority of the buildings are from 6 to 10 units and only 10% of the buildings in the area are owner-occupied. While there has been a very great loss of population over the last 30 years, there has not been a collapse of the housing market. Landlords have slowly improved and combined units as the Italian community that remained was able to pay more in rent and demanded better apartments. Despite the improvements to the housing that did take place, the rents remained among the lowest in the City.

The housing market has been tight for a number of years, with a fixed number of dwelling units, and a continuing need of young marrieds and new arrivals for housing. Despite this demand, the very homogenous nature of community economically kept rents very low.

The recent demand for North End apartments by outsiders has started significant changes in the community. Landlords have been able to raise rents in many cases beyond the reach of long time residents with low or fixed incomes, and there has been some dislocation. Common has been the renovation of buildings, with eviction of the former tenants, and the construction of modernized apartments geared to the young single and professional who can pay rents several times what the former tenants payed. The long term implication of the process is the almost complete turnover in the neighborhood, and the North End becoming an extension of the luxury housing in the Waterfront. To meet the new demands for intown housing some owners of apartment buildings are modernizing and then selling the units as condominiums.



## Housing Stock

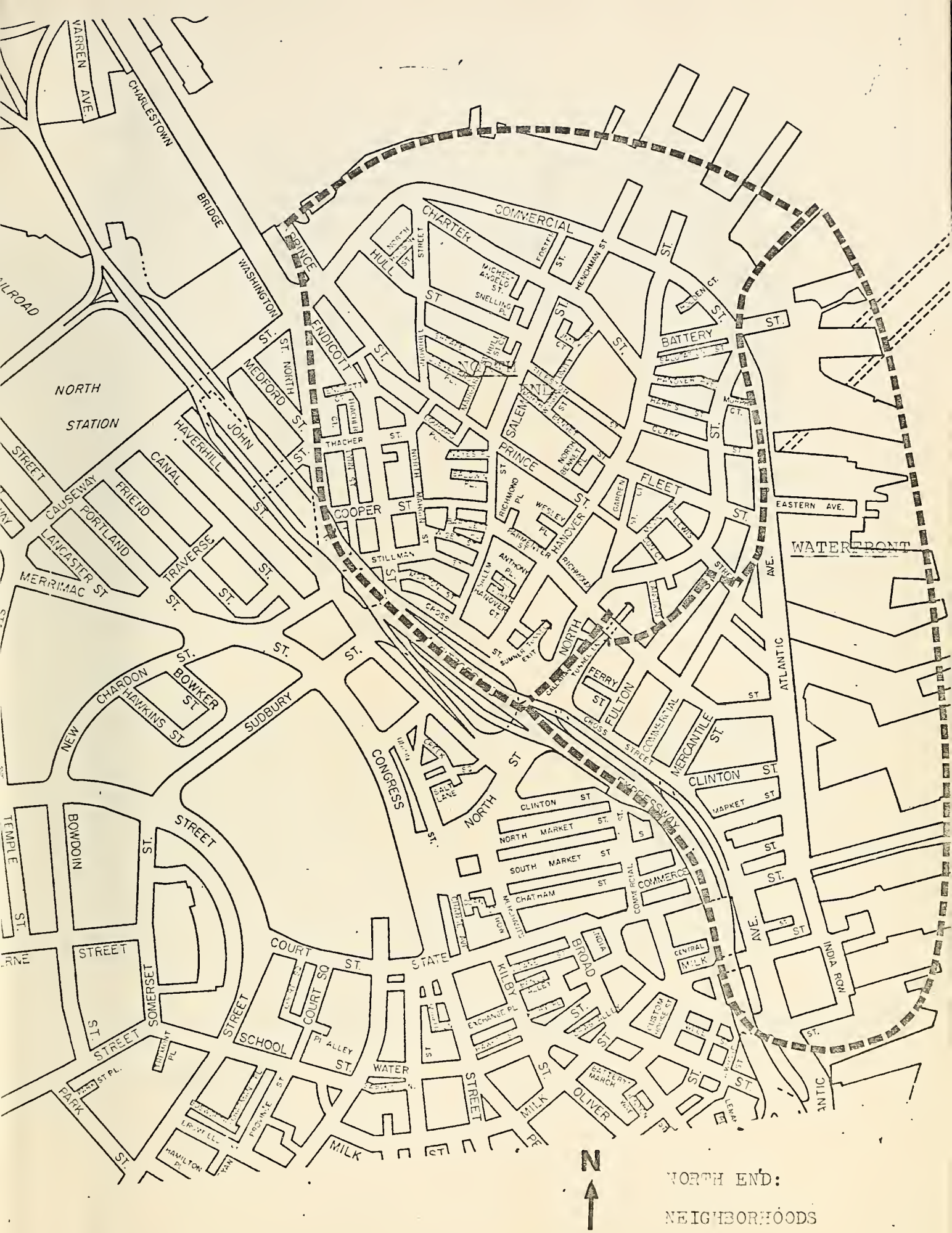
The vast majority of the apartment buildings in the North End were built as tenement housing between 1880 and 1920. There are some buildings that date back later than that, and which are generally of 3-4 units, but virtually no housing has been built since 1920. The majority of the tenement buildings are from 4-6 stories, and originally they had only common bathrooms on each floor and often no showers or bathtubs. Even today nearly 40% of the dwelling units in the neighborhood lack complete plumbing and many residents depend on the public bath house.

The housing stock is for the most part solid, but requires extensive capital investment to provide modern plumbing, electrical service and heating. In the Waterfront the lack of federal low interest rehabilitation money will result in virtually all of rehab units having very high rents.

Due to the very favorable rental market and the outlook for the future, almost any building that is standing is a valuable piece of real estate and economical to renovate. There are virtually no abandoned buildings, and the vacant buildings that do exist are being held onto by owners waiting for a more favorable economic climate.







NORTH END:  
NEIGHBORHOODS





## NORTH END

### Population

The North End community as it has come to be recognized is that area of land between the Central Artery and Boston Harbor, and running from the Charlestown bridge to Commercial Street. The area was larger in the past, but the construction of the expressway and urban renewal have resulted in the present boundaries. The neighborhood has been declining in population for almost 30 years, but the rate of decline has been slowing, and at present the population is stable at about 11,000 people. With the conversion of some non-residential buildings to dwelling units in the near future, the population well might make a modest climb to 12-13,000 in the next 5 years. The neighborhood is for the most part of very modest incomes, and has a very high percentage of families earning less than \$5000 per year (23%). There are a large number of elderly persons living in the community on fixed incomes or with families, who have been especially hard hit in the last several years. There has and continues to be a out-migration of young married couples who can not find adequate housing with in the community. This problem has been compounded in recent years by the increasing demand for North End apartments by young singles and professionals who appreciate the character and accessibility of the neighborhood.

<u>Total 1970</u>	<u>Change '60-70</u>	<u>Italian '60</u>	<u>Italian '70</u>	<u>% Over 60</u>	<u>0-17</u>
10,250	-17%	90%	65%	17%	23%
<u>Med. Inc.</u>	<u>% Families Under 5,000</u>				
\$8100	23%				

### Housing

The vast majority of the housing in the North End was built around the turn of the century, and for the most part the buildings are structurally sound and often offer attractive apartments. However, a majority of the structures require major improvements to their plumbing, heating, and/or electrical systems to bring them up to code and permit the rehabilitation of the buildings into modern dwelling units. In 1970, 40% of the dwelling units lacked complete plumbing, probably the highest percentage in the City. To do the required improvements will require in the area of several thousand dollars per unit. There are opportunities for the creation of new housing units through the conversion of several non-residential structures in and around the community that are only marginally viable as commercial or industrial buildings. The most pressing need is for the preservation of existing family sized units, and the provision of such units whenever rehabilitation takes place.

<u>Total D.U.'s</u>	<u>Units Needing Over 1,000</u>	<u>Owner Occ.</u>	<u>% Units in 1-2 Families</u>
4009	1237	560	7%

### Abandoned Structures



## Commercial Area

The commercial area is within the heart of the community and generally on the first floor of a residential building. While the overall number of business is down from 20 years ago and there are vacant store fronts scattered throughout the community, this is more a function of the population loss and the demise of the very small ma and pa type retail operation. The businesses that do exist are relying more on outside and visitor business, and the outlook is good. The major problem facing the commercial enterprises is the lack of parking and service. Because they are within the downtown, peripheral parking is not possible and the area is caught up in the bigger problem of traffic and parking in the downtown. Likewise, the health of the commercial activity in the neighborhood is affected by nearby commercial activity in the downtown, such as the restaurant and commercial activity in the waterfront, the blackstone markets, and in the near future the Faneuil Hall development. To date the spinoff has probably been beneficial, but for the commercial area to continue to prosper and compete, it must become easier for people to drive and/or walk to the area. This means improved parking, and improved pedestrian access under the Artery and within the community.

## Community and Other Groups

Many community and social groups exist in the North End, with many of them organized around a special project or interest. The North End Rehabilitation and Conservation Committee is as close as one comes to being an umbrella group. The North End Community Action program has an active board and membership, the businessmen are organized, and groups formed during the Waterfront Restudy cut across a wide range of interests in the community.

## Summary of Needs

Income or rental assistance

Rehabilitation financing with rental controls

Commercial and residential parking improvements

Conservation controls



## WATERFRONT

### Population

The Waterfront community is a new community created through the Urban Renewal process. The area was formally the commercial and industrial area immediately south of the North End between the Expressway and the Harbor. Prior to the renewal process there were very few residents in the area. To date the area has grown to 1000 people, and by the time the project is complete there will be 3000 people in the area. The area is populated for the most part by high income residents with an average income of near \$20,000 according to a 1974 survey. The majority of the residents either do not have children or their children are adults and not living at home. In the future the community will become more economically balanced with the construction of elderly housing and some assisted family units. Due to the high cost of rehabilitation and the lack of federal low interest rehab loans, the housing along Fulton and Commercial Streets will be out of the reach of all but the affluent.

<u>Total 1970</u>	<u>Change '60-70</u>	<u>Black '60</u>	<u>Black '70</u>	<u>% Over 60</u>	<u>0-17</u>
827	+240%	negligible		17%	9%
<u>Med. Inc.</u>	<u>% Families Under 5,000</u>				
\$11,200	none				

All the constructed and planned housing in this area is within the renewal project, and all of it is either new construction or the result of extensive renovation.

<u>Total D.U.'s</u>	<u>Units Needing Over 1,000</u>	<u>Owner Occ.</u>	<u>% Units in 1-2 Families</u>
71%		20	0

### Abandoned Structures

### Commercial Area

The Waterfront area has intentionally provided for a large amount of commercial floor space. Most of the development to date has commercial activity on the first and often second floors. The most viable development has been the opening of a large number of large restaurants. While they have added to the life and character of the area, there are problems of traffic and parking, as well as the possibility of too many such activities detracting from the residential qualities of the area.

### Community and Other Groups

The Waterfront Residents Association has been very active during the planning stage of the renewal process, and will most likely remain active once the project is complete.



## Summary of Needs

Traffic and parking improvements

Rehabilitation/rental program to insure income mix in rehab housing





North End  
(Italian)  
Waterfront

. TOTAL 1970 pop.	\$10,250	827
. % CHANGE '60-'70	15%	1240%
. 1960 BLACK (1) (2) Italian	(2) 90%	(1) -
. 1970 BLACK (1) (2) Italian	(2) 65%	(1) 2%
. % over 60	17%	17%
. Median Family Income	8100	11,107
. % Families under 5,000	23%	negligible
. Total Dwelling Units	4009	71%
. Units Needing over \$1,000	1237	
. Owner Occupied Structures	560	20
. % of Units 1-2 Family	7%	0
. Abandoned Buildings		0
. Market Condition	strong	strong
. Commercial Area Land	fair strong	strong

B6SR Ne  
Central(North End)  
BRA. Plan Dept. DPP.  
Neighborhood profile. Pre-  
liminary.

R Ne

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